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The African-American Struggle for Equality: Two Divergent Approaches

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THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY:
TWO DIVERGENT APPROACHES

by

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of the requirements for Departmental Honors

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on two leaders and how their divergent strategies for one goal led to them working together without actively coordinating their efforts. The research conducted in the paper is based primarily on the writings of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. It examines their upbringing and their views on education, labor and voting rights.

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CHAPTER 1

Slavery's end brought African Americans toward an equal playing field, especially with the help of the Civil War Amendments, which ended slavery (through the Thirteenth Amendment), ensured citizenship (with the Fourteenth Amendment), and gave suffrage (with the Fifteenth Amendment). Or at least that is what was supposed to happen. But as history tells us-- it did not happen.

With the end of slavery, one of the nation's darkest faults, a whole race of people became displaced. Some would actually argue that African Americans had not been displaced since they still occupied the same space at the bottom that they had occupied while slavery was thriving. At any rate, African Americans, the newest class of "citizens" to the United States, lacked the status and quality of citizenship others had.

After the end of slavery, a new social context emerged known as the Jim Crow Era. The Jim Crow Era restricted blacks in what they could do, even though there may have been constitutional rights protecting them. Jim Crow Laws, as they are sometimes referred to, are not laws at all. Rather they are customs which at the time segregated blacks and whites. Blacks were not permitted to drink from the same water fountains as whites, nor were they permitted to attend the same schools. For blacks, voting was different than it was for whites. Unlike whites, blacks had to pass tests in order to be able to vote. Many knew these practices were wrong, but few stepped up to do anything to change them.

A meager number of people came to the forefront to advocate the rights of African Americans. Two men in particular stepped up to the table to lead their race to the same platform that other US citizens sat on: Booker T. Washington, a former slave, and

W. E. B. Du Bois. These two men articulated two views, which at the time were very different. These views left people divided as to what was the preferable approach.

Although there is not always a right or wrong approach in these types of matters, these two men advocated two diametrically opposed views, except perhaps in their emphasis on the importance of education and the right to vote as a means to achieving equality.

The approaches that these men took seem to stem from their early childhood, as well as other events that took place in their lives.

In short, this study will analyze primary sources in combination with secondary sources to ascertain their similarities and differences. This paper asks: What exactly were the goals of each individual? What did they absolutely disagree on? What did they agree on? What things, if any, did one address and the other completely avoid discussing? This paper also investigates how they were affected by unequal treatment and how that may have changed how they approached the problem. And importantly, this paper will examine why it is that they did not work in conjunction with each other, but rather took different approaches.

What is uncovered is that Washington comes across as more practical and for he receives a lot of criticism for this. Much of the criticism Washington receives comes about because he is being judged without consideration of the social context at the time. Du Bois, who was radical in some ways, helped to further Washington's program, though not purposely.

CHAPTER 2

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in Franklin County, Virginia. The exact date of Washington's birth is not known because records of slaves' births were not kept. Thanks to the autobiography, which Washington entitled *Up From Slavery*, we have a good understanding of what the conditions were like for Washington and others similarly situated. There is, however, some controversy as to whether or not he was completely honest in his writings. One does recognize that the biography is told through his perspective. That said, this charge is not made on factual grounds but rather on whether or not he made some conditions sound less gruesome than they really were. This effort to play down facts was interpreted by some as a way of appealing to whites.

What is known of Washington's early life is that he lived with his mother Jane, his brother John, and his sister Amanda on the slave plantation. Little is known about Washington's father. It is believed that his father was a white man, possibly one of his mother's former masters. Parents who were slaves lacked time to devote to the proper upbringing of their children. Because slaves could not read, parents did not have the means to educate their children in anything other than labor. As a child, Washington had the chore of carrying schoolbooks for the young mistress. "The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise" (Washington, 1978). This image lit a fire within Washington that lasted the rest of his life.

Fortunately for Washington, he did not live all of his life as a slave. In fact, Washington was nine years of age when he and his family were emancipated from

slavery (Washington, 1978, p. 2). They moved out from the master's plot and found their own residence. Although Washington and his family were free, some aspects of life, such as housing, were no better than under slavery because, when slavery ended, former slaves were released with no means of providing for themselves. This hindrance left many African Americans to some degree as slaves-- perhaps not legally, but socially.

Washington's early childhood was marked by a culture of work. From the time that he was a slave and even afterwards, he worked ardently. In fact Washington and his brother John were made to work with their stepfather to help produce more wealth for the family. Washington's stepfather was employed in the salt mines. His job was to scoop out salt and put it in a barrel. After filling the barrel they would place a lid on it and stamp it with the number 18, which was assigned to his stepfather. Because the workers were paid by the barrel, it was easier for the family to earn more money if the two children helped to fill the barrels. It was at the salt mine that Washington learned the first and only number prior to entering school.

The desire to attend school sprang up again as Washington found out about the classes that were being conducted at the local schoolhouse. Washington was persistent about begging his parents for both educational material and the chance to go to school. Like most African Americans at that time, his family was simply working to survive. However, the family made sacrifices. Washington's mother knew how much he wanted to obtain an education but, she also knew the realities of their socioeconomic status. His mother worked hard so that she could furnish him with a spelling book (Washington, 1978, p. 27). Washington was never sure just how she was able to provide the book for him.

Booker T. Washington, the T standing for Taliaferro, was born simply Booker Taliaferro. However, through much of Washington's upbringing, he had no knowledge of the fact that his name included Taliaferro (Washington, 1978, pp. 34-35). He was simply Booker. In fact, it was not until he first went to school that he adopted Washington, which was his stepfather's first name, because he wanted to be more like the other students who had both first and last names. (Moore, 2003, p. 15). In *Up From Slavery*, Washington points out that many African Americans at that time attached middle initials to their names. These initials did not represent a name but rather a sense of freedom. Many referred to them as their entitlements (Washington, 1978, p. 23). Although he gained in some sense a full name, Washington did not gain a sense of fulfillment from his education, largely because his attendance was irregular. Eventually he stopped attending school altogether.

While working at a coalmine, Washington came to learn about Hampton Institute. The thing about Hampton that interested Washington was that students could go to school and work off the price of attendance, all the while learning a valuable trade. Washington made it his mission to get to that school. Working in the coalmine was tiring, dangerous, and extremely dirty. Washington hated being dirty, and working at the mine required a great of effort to get clean. When the opportunity came for Washington to get out of the mine, he jumped at it.

The opportunity came for Washington to work in a house for a lady by the name of Mrs. Viola Ruffner. He described her as one of the strictest employers he knew. Still, Washington felt it was better than being in the coalmines. While working with Mrs. Ruffner, Washington learned to be meticulous about cleaning. He later found that this

would serve to his advantage. When he arrived at Hampton, Washington was in a sense waitlisted. The registrar at first was unsure as to whether or not she wanted to admit him to the institution. Finally, she gave Washington what he understood to be a test. She asked him to sweep the quarters. He felt if his methods of cleaning were up to the standards of Mrs. Ruffner, then he could please anyone (Washington, 1978, pp. 51-3). Thus, by effectively sweeping the room he gained his admission into Hampton Institute, passing what is arguably the most important exam of his educational career.

Washington noticed from an early age that there was a degree of inequality amongst the races. Early on, his early acknowledgement of prejudice led to a degree of envy. Washington envied whites, particularly for the education which they could receive, both when he was in slavery and when he had been freed (Washington, 1978, p. 39). Eventually, Washington figured that jealousy and resentment would not serve to his benefit and that to move beyond his current state he must make use of those opportunities which were available to him.

Education at Hampton emphasized not only subjects such as English and math but also practical skills. School was scheduled in such a way that every hour of Washington's day was occupied by study or work (Washington, 1978, p. 61). By day Washington attended class and by night he worked to tidy the college.

Much of Booker T. Washington's early life likely influenced the way in which he handled most of the problems that would arise in regards to racial equality for the African American race.

CHAPTER 3

After the abolition of slavery, there were a number of voices that spoke for the black community. However, after many of those members passed away, there was a void in leadership in the black community. After a period of time without a leader, Booker T. Washington emerged as the voice of African Americans, particularly after the passing of Frederick Douglass. Among the issues that Washington focused on were a need for manual labor, education, equality, and voting.

From the beginning of slavery in the late 1700s until the end of slavery in 1865 with the passage of the 13th amendment, African Americans had always been forced to labor. Washington believed that labor was a concept that many African Americans were straying from. Washington himself felt that there was a huge need for manual labor. Where exactly this thought emanated from is hard to say. Maybe it was the fact that he had always had to work. Since early childhood, Washington had worked in strenuous jobs such as the salt and coalmines referenced earlier. Or maybe it was his time spent studying at Hampton which seems to have influenced him to a greater degree.

Not only did Washington need to prove that he could clean and pass the strictest of standards to gain admission into Hampton, he also had to work throughout college for the institute. In fact, it was Hampton that Washington based the model of the Tuskegee Institute upon. Tuskegee was a higher education institution based in Alabama. Washington founded the institute in large part. Students who attended this institute obtained both a knowledge-based education as well as trade skills.

At Tuskegee, Washington worked to create a working culture among both the students and the members of the faculty. He expressed that he “had no patience with any

school for [his] race in the South which did not teach its students the dignity of labour” (Washington, 1978, p. 73). At first, some of the students and members of the faculty were hesitant to engage in laborious practices. Some faculty members objected because they came to Tuskegee to teach, rather than work in the fields. On behalf of the students, parents would write to Washington requesting that their students not be made to go out into the fields. They insisted that they had sent their students to Tuskegee to learn not to work. Some parents even threatened to remove their students from the school if they could not be spared from labor. Many African Americans at that time saw that school as the way for their family to escape both fieldwork and poverty.

Washington had great visions for his people. He wanted them to go out and reach the highest of heights. However, Washington was aware of the limitations that were presented to blacks during that time period. During a survey, “[w]e learned that about eighty-five per cent of the coloured people in the Gulf States depended upon agriculture for their living. Since this was true, we wanted to be careful not to educate our students out of sympathy with agricultural life, so they would be attracted from the country to the cities, and yield to the temptation of trying to live by their wits” (Washington, 1978, p. 127). Washington goes on to say, “We wanted to give them such an education as would fit a large proportion of them to be teachers, and at the same time cause them to return to the plantation districts and show the people there how to put new energy and new ideas into farming, as well as into the intellectual and moral and religious life of the people” (Washington, 1978, p. 127). Knowing the realities of the situation, Washington wanted to provide African Americans with the skills that would prove useful for their current situation.

Washington was extremely supportive of education for the advancement of colored folks. However, what Washington had in mind was not the typical model of education. “We wanted to teach them to study actual things instead of mere books alone” (Washington, 1978, p. 126). He was realistic in terms of the Negro condition. He felt that African Americans' way out of poverty would be through labor. The goal for Washington was to provide students with skills that they could perfect and translate into a profitable career. “[W]e wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry, together with the spirit of industry, thrift, and economy that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us” (Washington, 1978, p. 126). In short, Washington advocated an industrial system of education for African Americans.

Although Washington articulated a system of agricultural education, he did not see it as the answer to all questions of the future. He saw that industrial work would need to be done at least by the first generation of African Americans so that future generations could branch out and do something more than industrial labor. “[M]y theory of education for the Negro would not, for example, confine him for all time to farm life—to the production of the best and the most sweet potatoes—but that if he succeeded in this line of industry, he could lay the foundations upon which his children and grandchildren could grow to higher and more important things in life” (Washington, 1978, p. 203). Although Washington’s plan seemed to confine the current generation to manual labor, he intended it to lay the groundwork for future generations to be able to pursue careers that were unaccompanied by manual labor. Washington felt that blacks had to show they were ready to achieve more, similar to his political views indicating that blacks needed to prove they had enough knowledge and character to be trusted to vote.

Washington knew the realities that the Negro faced. He was aware of the prejudice that existed and how African Americans had to work even harder just to be viewed as competitive in relation to whites, especially in relation to business. Washington knew that for Negroes to have a chance they would have to perform at their best. "The individual who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race. If the man can supply the need..., then it will lead eventually to a demand for the ... product, and with demand will come the ability to appreciate it and to profit by it" (Washington, 1978, p. 105). Washington felt that Americans were willing to pay for the best materials no matter the background of the makers. He felt that if African Americans could learn to make a product that was well made and in demand, individuals of all races would seek out their work. In effect, they would prove their worth and this would lead to their equality.

Washington's view of equality was based on conservatism. He did not push for equality, believing that it would come when the time was right. His belief was that if blacks could prove their worthiness then whites would extend equality to them. He believed that in the meantime the obstacles they faced would make them a stronger people. In his autobiography he wrote. "I used to envy the white boy who had not obstacles placed in the way of his becoming a Congressman, Governor, Bishop, or President by reason of the accident of his birth or race. I used to picture the way that I would act under such circumstances; how I would begin at the bottom and keep rising until I reached the highest round of success" (Washington, 1978, p. 39). He later figured that he would find more self-worth through having to work for equality rather than receiving it on a silver platter.

“The Negro boy has obstacles, discouragements, and temptations to battle with that are little known to those not situated as he is. When a white boy under takes a task, it is taken for granted that he will succeed. On the other hand, people are usually surprised if the Negro boy does not fail. In a word, the Negro youth starts out with the presumption against him” (Washington, 1978, p. 36). This is a change from his previous thoughts wherein Washington tended to envy the white boy for his simplistic life. Now he pitied him because he did not have to overcome many obstacles. What changed for Washington was his outlook on the problem. Perhaps he realized that all the wishing in the world could not change his circumstances, yet he knew that through hard work he would be better off. “In later years, I confess that I do not envy the white boy as I once did. I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed. Looked at from this standpoint, I almost reach the conclusion that often the Negro boy’s birth and connection with an unpopular race is an advantage, so far as real life is concerned” (Washington, 1978, pp. 39). It is doubtful that he actually believed this. He went on to say “With few exceptions, the Negro youth must work harder and must perform his task even better than a white youth in order to secure recognition. But out of the hard and unusual struggle through which he is compelled to pass, he gets a strength, a confidence, that one misses whose pathway is comparatively smooth by reason of birth and race” (Washington, 1978, pp. 39-40). There is little doubt that out of struggle one can emerge all the stronger having overcome adversity. But there is no certainty that through hard work and determination one will arrive at equality, for while the one was fighting to achieve a place where one could demand equality, others would be advancing. Essentially

Washington did not demand equality; rather he asked blacks to work on self-improvement in the hope that whites would see them as equals.

In many ways Washington was not an ardent proponent of equality by the use of the ballot. He felt that, in many ways, the Negro was not ready to vote. He felt that they lacked many of the necessary requirements that would aid them in voting, such as education and property attainment. Until the Negroes found such requirements, Washington asked that they give up their right to vote, saying: "It is the duty of the Negro... to deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights" (Washington, 1978, p. 235). To many this would seem unjust, but it is important to note that Washington felt the same should apply to whites who were not educated and did not meet the property requirements. Of particular importance was the need for education. "More and more I find it necessary to change the law bearing upon the franchise to make the law apply with absolute honesty, and without opportunity for double dealing or evasion, to both races alike" (Washington, 1978, p. 86). Washington considered tests useful, provided that they were applied fairly to both races. "Still as I look back now over the entire period of our freedom, I cannot help feeling that it would have been wiser if some plan could have been put in operation which would have made the possession of a certain amount of education or property, or both a requirement for the exercise of the franchise, and a way provided by which this test should be made to apply honestly and squarely to both the white and black races" (Washington, 1978, p. 84). However, this seems to be wishful thinking on the part of Washington, especially considering that so many blacks' right to

vote had been suppressed.

“Any other course my daily observation in the South convinces me, will be unjust to the Negro, unjust to the white man, and unfair to the rest of the state in the Union, and will be like slavery, a sin that at some time we shall have to pay for” (Washington, 1978, pp. 86-7). Washington advocated for a system of equality for all, even if it came at the cost of whites rather than the benefits of African Americans, more likely because he saw it as practical, not because he saw it as the best method.

How long did Mr. Washington want African Americans to wait for the right to vote to be furnished to them? There is no direct answer to that question. Washington eloquently states: “My own belief is, although I have never said so in so many words, that the time will come when the Negro in the South will be accorded all the political rights which his ability, character, and material possessions entitle him to” (Washington, 1978, pp. 234-5). The problem with the belief that Mr. Washington articulated is that there is no form of a time line, not even a rough projection of when political rights may be extended. He also does not provide any plan of recourse in case such rights are not extended. He goes on to say, “I think, though, that the opportunity to freely exercise such political rights will not come in any large degree through outside or artificial forcing, but will be accorded to the Negro by the Southern white people themselves, and that they will protect him in the exercise of those rights” (Washington, 1978, pp. 234-5). Essentially what Washington did was ask for African Americans to sit idly by and wait indefinitely so that the right to vote may be granted if the whites felt sufficiently gracious to present them with such a privilege. Washington said that whites could not be pushed to give rights to African Americans, but would give them when they were ready to do so.

Though Washington acknowledged the ill treatment that blacks received, he did not feel that blacks were the ones most injured.

Washington saw the unequal treatment of African Americans would come at a much greater cost to whites than it would to blacks. He felt that the mean spirits would affect them in their daily lives, exceed their dealings with blacks, and harm whites. “The more I consider the subject, the more strongly I am convinced that the most harmful effect of the practice to which the people in certain sections of the South have felt themselves compelled to resort, in order to get rid of the force of the Negroes’ ballot, is not wholly in the wrong done to the Negro, but in the permanent injury to the morals of the white man” (Washington, 1978, p. 166). Although Washington acknowledges the harm that would be done to those barring African Americans’ right to vote, he is careful not to dismiss the harm that would be done to African Americans by disenfranchisement. “The wrong to the Negro is temporary, but to the morals of the white man the injury is permanent. I have noted time and time again that when an individual perjures himself in order to break the force of the black man’s ballot, he soon learns to practice dishonesty in other relations of life, not only where the Negro is concerned, but equally so where a white man is concerned. The white man who begins by cheating a Negro usually ends by cheating a white man” (Washington, 1978, p. 166). By harming blacks, they essentially learn the means to harm one another and, as a result, all of society is harmed.

CHAPTER 4

To say that the lives of Booker T. Washington and William Edward Burghardt Du Bois were slightly different would be to state the obvious, although they did share some commonalities. In contrast to Washington, who was born a slave, Du Bois was born free on February 23, 1868, roughly three years after slavery ended. As a matter of fact, both of Du Bois's parents were born free. Born to parents of mixed descent, Du Bois had what some would consider the privilege of being able to pass as a member of the Caucasian race (Wolters, 2002, p. 5). Author Thomas Harris says that for Du Bois race was no impediment (Harris, 1993, p. 35). He was born to Mary Burghardt and Alfred Du Bois. He had no contact with his father and was raised single-handedly with his older brother Adelbert by his mother (Du Bois, 1968).

Du Bois performed well in regards to academics as a youth. In fact, Du Bois came to see education as the road out of poverty (Moore, 2003, p. 39). They lived in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Du Bois and his mother were not rich by any standards.

Race in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, was not a factor that was stressed very much. This may have been due to the fact that there were only around fifty African Americans in the city (Hynes, 2004). During his early school years, Du Bois was not made to feel any different than his white counterparts. At a nearly homogeneously Caucasian school, practically all of his childhood best friends were white.

Du Bois dreamed of going to Harvard in his senior year of high school. But as graduation day drew nearer, that prospect grew faint. With the help of his former high school principal, Du Bois was able to secure a pledge from four different churches to pay

his tuition so that he could attend Fisk University (Wolters, 2002, p. 11). Fisk University would be an entirely new experience for Du Bois.

Du Bois's first trip to the South was an entirely new experience. This was one of the first times in which Du Bois was in an environment that was majority African American. This was also the first time that Du Bois was subjected to such a high degree of racism. In his autobiography, he says, "[n]o one but a Negro going into the South without previous experience of color caste can have any conception of its barbarism" (Du Bois, 1968, p. 121). Studying at Fisk University served to change Du Bois's perspective on the issue of the race struggle.

The culture within Fisk was one of camaraderie. Students would make a full-fledged effort to help other students coming up after them. "Fisk students saw it as their duty to go among their people and lead them out of bondage—not physical bondage, of course, but the bonds of poverty and ignorance that they believed were keeping the race from progressing" (Moore, 2003, p. 42). This idea of *noblesse oblige* not only existed at the university but spread throughout the community.

Like those of Booker T. Washington, the events of Du Bois's early life likely helped to shape his perspective on race relations and the best means for racial equality.

We now turn to W. E. B. Du Bois's strategy.

CHAPTER 5

As is well known, the early twentieth century was plagued by problems relating to race. According to Du Bois, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, -- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 17). This was a complication that for many of years the country had worked to rectify.

Much of the 19th and 20th century was particularly hard for the Negro, not to say that it was not hard for others. In the years after slavery, African Americans worked not only to make a living for themselves and their families but also to gain equality. “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 11). Right after being released from slavery, African Americans not only had to work to live, but also had to find out where it is that they fit into society. After being subjected to a station of inferiority they had to work to elevate themselves to a stage equal to that of their white counterparts.

Du Bois made it clear that, unlike whites, blacks had to be two people within one body; he termed this a double consciousness. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 11). On

the one hand they had their own community, which for many years they had been limited to. On the other hand they were expected to be “Americans” without having any of the accompanying luxuries. Du Bois’s demand for equality came with a sense of urgency, calling for blacks’ rights now rather than later, as exemplified by his request for the right to vote: “We want full manhood suffrage, and we want it now, henceforth and forever”. He felt there was no reason that they should be made to wait for their share of equality.

The knowledge of where one has been is vital to knowing where one is going. As a group of people who share a common history, it is important that events that have worked so effectively to stifle them be taken into account when any effort is taken to move forward. “If then we start out to train an ignorant and unskilled people with a heritage of bad habits, our system of training must set before itself two great aims -- the one dealing with knowledge and character, the other part seeking to give the child the technical knowledge necessary for him to earn a living under the present circumstances” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). To have either of these, in and of itself, would be of no help to the negro community. “[W]e could give black boys trades, but that alone will not civilize a race of ex-slaves; we might simply increase their knowledge of the world, but this would not necessarily make them wish to use this knowledge honestly; we might seek to strengthen character and purpose” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). To have one of these without having the others would be to short change the Negro and to deprive him of all that is necessary to progress and develop as a complete individual, not only capable of working but also of solving the challenges that would arise in life.

The black community was in need of “men (and women),” not in the sense that there was a deficiency in the number of men in the town but rather that the society was

lacking in educated men. Towns could have educated men, but they could only be obtained through schools. “Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). The education of the men and women of the community was seen as necessary for the progression of the black population.

Du Bois felt that education was essential to the development of the Negro. He championed the use of not only industrial training, but also education in fields such as literature and math. Education to Du Bois was more than just the teaching of individuals to work. Du Bois stated, “Education must not simply teach work -- it must teach Life” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). Du Bois felt that it was necessary for education to teach those faculties which could be used beyond work. “Education and work are the levers to uplift a people” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). He argued that education in conjunction with work was necessary.

While criticizing Washington, Du Bois makes the point that “It was not enough that the teachers of teachers should be trained in technical normal methods; they must also so far as possible, be broadminded, cultured men and women, to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 67). He felt that teachers should be able to provide their students with more than just the knowledge of how to do a job, that they should provide them with knowledge that would be useful in their daily lives.

Du Bois felt that education would play a vital role in uplifting African Americans. He posed the question: “What under the present circumstance, must a system of education do in order to raise the Negro as quickly as possible in the scale of civilization” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*)? He proceeds to answer it by saying that “it must strengthen the Negro's character, increase his knowledge and teach him to earn a living” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). Aside from knowledge skills learned in education, Du Bois saw that “[e]ducation is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls, which molds and develops men” (Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*). It was clear to Du Bois that education did not and could not happen inside the school alone. Life, itself, served as a purposeful tool for teaching pertinent lessons.

While Du Bois notes that the emphasis on education should not be purely on labor, he cannot but underscore its importance in helping the race to develop. Although Du Bois argued for the African American community to be educated, his approach did not come without limitations. Du Bois's approach was one that articulated the need for only an elite group of men and women to be educated. Du Bois limited it to the top ten percent of achieving individuals. “The Talented Tenth,” as his approach was called, argued that only certain members of the population were fit to be educated through higher education. In effect, he relegated all other individuals to work in trades. “They forgot, too, just as their successors are forgetting, the rule of inequality: -- that of the million black youth, some were fitted to know and some to dig; that some had the talent and capacity of university men, and some the talent and capacity of blacksmiths; and that true training meant neither that all should be made a missionary of culture to an untaught people, and the other a free workman among serfs. And to seek to make the blacksmith a

scholar is almost as silly as the more modern scheme of making the scholar a blacksmith; almost but not quite” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 59). Though this policy does seem to place a ceiling on African Americans’ potential, it is important that one consider the fact that this approach was meant to lift up the community as a whole. The aim was to have the talented members become educated and then come back and help their community.

That the inequities of society could be mitigated through educating the disadvantaged population was not a question for Du Bois. “Education will set this tangle straight,” he said (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 64). However, to believe that education alone could solve the problem that had been created through years of slavery and social inequality was not something that Du Bois advocated.

The fact that Du Bois saw education as important to the improvement of blacks’ condition of life does not even begin to speak to how strongly he felt about some of the other elements he saw as essential to the uplifting of African Americans. Du Bois leaves no room for doubt that the most important requirement for ensuring the equality of blacks is the use of the vote. In an article published in 1919 titled “Votes,” DU Bois says “Make no mistake: the greatest Negro problem is Votes for Negroes. Everything else is secondary” (Du Bois, *Votes*, 1919). The logic behind this is that without a political voice one’s freedoms can easily be sidestepped, making ideas such as education and equality mere fantasies.

Prior to understanding the importance of the ballot, it was easy for some uninformed members of the population to discount the need for the right to vote. But as people began to learn what could come out of the right to vote, they came to see it as

essential to self-preservation. “The ballot, which before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 13). By having the right to vote one could expand his freedoms and protect the things most important to him.

Without the vote to represent one's own interests, a person becomes subject to the whims of others. He becomes subject not to those acting in his best interest but to those acting within their own best interest. When a whole group of people is disenfranchised, they become vulnerable to almost any kind of attack. “The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defence, -- else what shall save us from a second slavery” (Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folk*, 1999, p. 15). Although a second slavery may seem a little excessive, it is not wholly impossible when an entire race of people lacks the power of the ballot. Simply put, the most effective means for a people to actively safeguard themselves is by voting. “With a vote in our hands, we are freemen” (Du Bois, *Votes*, 1919). That other freedoms can be taken from African Americans or any group of people when they lack the power to vote still remains.

CHAPTER 6

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois were two very different individuals. Early on in their lives they faced events that would characterize how they viewed the world and its potential for change, particularly in its dealing with race. Both gentlemen focused on issues such as education, political equality, and social equality.

Washington, for one reason or another, emerged as the leader of the black community. There does not seem to be one reason that explains this phenomenon. However, it does seem that the following factors may be relevant. First, Washington was the first of the two men who emerged on the scene. Washington's approach may have been viewed as more practical as it asked for only minor changes. Followers of Washington may have also found it easier to identify with Washington, as he did work much of his life, as opposed to Du Bois, who was Ivy League educated.

In comparing these two gentlemen, it is necessary to start with the overall approach that they took. Washington can be viewed as having taken a conservative approach. This view is based on the fact that Washington was not very demanding. This is seen in his view of how blacks should come to obtain the vote, social equality, and education. Du Bois is seen as being more progressive or radical, at least relative to Washington.

What could have caused the variance between their views? It could be the fact that Du Bois lived where race was nearly a non-issue or that he traveled and saw other countries where race was a non-issue.

In regards to these two individuals, one would have to agree with Du Bois' approach to reaching racial equality; not because Du Bois presented a great approach and

way of dealing with the problems, but rather because his approach was more progressive in relation to Washington's.

Washington and Du Bois both saw education as one of the most important tools for elevating the status of blacks. What differed amongst these men was the type of education they saw as necessary for the advancement of African Americans. In regards to education, Washington was far too limited in only demanding technically based education. One does recognize the fact that there were limitations in regards to the availability of jobs requiring intellectual knowledge for African American. However, intellectually based education, which Du Bois requests, is more conducive to meeting the demands of life. In terms of labor, work is necessary; however, it is not the only means of achieving equality. By greater education one does become more capable and a better functioning member of society.

Today, voting is seen as a necessary precursor to the protection of one's rights in the United States and in many foreign countries as well. Booker T. Washington and Du Bois both knew the importance of voting and what could potentially come about if an entire segment of the population had the vote, as opposed to if it lacked the right to vote. Hence both Washington and Du Bois craved the right to vote for African Americans. What differed between the two was their demand for voting. One would have to agree with Du Bois in terms of voting. The call for voting must be *now* rather than *later*. Waiting for rights to be given could last without end, especially if a race is seen as being complacent with the rights they already have because they do not speak up.

Washington's call for African Americans to wait for social equality to be extended did not pan out as he thought it would. For nearly seventy years blacks were

humble and did not ask for much. They worked diligently but they did not get any closer to attaining their rights, as Washington thought they would. This gave rise to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X who demanded civil rights for African Americans. Like Washington and Du Bois, King and Malcolm entered a contest of dueling opinions toward one common goal.

What seems to be the case when two or more leaders emerge with two separate plans for achieving the same goal is that they seem to work together, though not necessarily purposefully. Generally, one individual's goal is seen as more radical than the other - in this case it is Du Bois. The radical individual makes it easier for the other individual's method to be used.

Through conducting research on Washington and Du Bois, it becomes easy for one to disagree with Washington and see him as a conformist. Washington can be labeled a conformist largely because he asked blacks to give up their place in the political scene and because he only asked for industrial education rather than an intellectual education. But what one must consider is that this judgment is *time centric*, based on sentiments that are derived from today's culture. Yes, Washington's views are limited; however, for his time, his views were rather progressive. Washington also had limitations on what he could ask for while maintaining his influence among the white community. Washington's views were seen as less progressive when Du Bois emerged on the scene. When looking at history one must be careful to consider past events in their context.

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